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## **How do Early Years Educators sustain and define their professionalism? A methodological approach to eliciting early years educators' thinking**

**ABSTRACT:** This research has been concerned with eliciting the voices and thinking of a group of early years' educators across three Local Education Authorities in West Yorkshire. The early years of education require a reflective, articulate and highly qualified workforce. The ability to reflect on and evaluate practice, prescription and one's own thoughts about it must be the key to professionalism in the early years. The objective of this research was to extrapolate the thinking of a small group of EYES across three local education authorities (LEAs) in West Yorkshire. The methodology of eliciting teacher thinking was employed to gain access to their voices and discover what were their critical issues and interests, their professional and practical knowledge. Rather than directing the participants to responding to specific aspects, the research was conducted to enable them to demonstrate any areas of interest and critical issues arising from their professional roles. Teacher thinking' is an effective methodology

to determine the thinking and knowledge of experienced and complex professionals working in a variety of settings. This empirical research was undertaken to elicit educators' perspectives to determine their own understandings, with accounts in their own terms through in-depth open-ended interviews, questionnaires, personal/professional time-lines, video-reflective interviews on practice and focus group interviews. These varied different data collection strategies are key to the research as they elicited holistic and varied perspectives on the early years educators professionalism. The aim was to give early years educators a voice, promote recognition of the complexity of the phenomena to be studied and determine the most effective method of eliciting their thinking. This article presents the methodology and findings from this research - how have this group of EYES sustained and defined their professionalism?

**KEYWORDS:** early years education and care, eliciting thinking methodology, professional knowledge, professionalism

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## INTRODUCTION

### – THE CHALLENGES IN ENGLAND FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATORS

In England, there have been times during the last thirty-five years that early years educators have perceived their roles have been articulated by governments in ways that have displaced their professionalism. This research began in 2000, and the data was collected at the time of the introduction of the Foundation Stage and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS). The changes in primary education throughout the 1990s in England had created pressure on “early years educators” (EYES) to provide a curriculum, which they did not think was developmentally appropriate for young children. The introduction of the Foundation Stage in September 2000 was a very significant „change” for early years education, yet whilst the play-based curriculum and pedagogy was welcomed, there were still diverse messages filtering through to the EYES. During the New Labour government, significant changes occurred in the early years curriculum and pedagogy through the development of the CGFS (Department of Education and Skills [DfES], 2000) and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2008 (DCSF, 2008); the development of the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF); new Sure Start services for young children and roles. In 2013, the Coalition government changed the title, and the ethos of the DCSF to the Department of Education (DoE); market enterprise gave rise to schools opting to academy and Free School status; the *Nutbrown Review* (2012) commissioned by the Government examined qualifications and professional status of early years educators and the *Truss Report* (2013) presented significant changes to statutory adult/child ratios for childcare. Whilst all these policy changes require years educators to implement them and alter working practice, they also cause pressure; affect confidence, self esteem and status; challenge professional knowledge and values.

There has never been a more important time for early years educators to establish their professionalism. The early years of education require reflective, articulate and highly qualified workforce. The ability to reflect on and evaluate practice, prescription and one’s own thoughts about it must be the key to professionalism in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Moyle, 2001; Hughes & Menmuir, 2002; Brock, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2013; Brock & Rankin, 2011). The voices of those working in the field therefore need to be elicited to create a more comprehensive perspective of professionalism for ECEC. EYPS need to engage in professional discourse or addressed issues at policy level (Osgood, 2006). The field requires a knowledgeable, highly qualified and articulate workforce. Practitioners need to be able to define what their own professionalism entails (Moyle, 2001). It would seem timely to promote a re-conceptualization of early years professionalism through developing a research agenda that „explores issues of professional roles and identity” (Woodrow, 2007, p. 241). Brock’s longitudinal research responds to this as it explores professionalism in the ECEC field, promoting recognition of the complexities of the roles of those who work with young children and developing a generic model of professionalism for ECEC.

- » Phase 1 – 2000 Pilot study trialling the methodological techniques.
- » Phase 2 – 2001-2002 Main study gathering data with the sample of 12 early years educators.
- » Phase 3 – 2006-2009 Trialling the model through continuing professional development seminars and email correspondence.
- » Phase 4 – 2007-2008 Follow-up study with nine of the original sample of early years educators.
- » Phase 5 – 2009-2010 Exploration of the model of professionalism across different disciplines working with young children—including early years professionals, health, social work, speech and language therapy, and librarianship.

The aim was to determine their professionalism by eliciting a sample of early years educators' professional thinking and practical knowledge. It is important to elicit the voices of the professionals themselves in order to get a true understanding of what each role entails. The research enabled them to reflect on any areas of interest and critical issues arising from their professional roles through a range of techniques aimed at eliciting their voices. The research (Phases 1, 2 and 4) has been interpretative and exploratory drawing on a methodology of „eliciting teacher thinking” to acquire the EYES' voices.

#### **WHY ELICITING TEACHER THINKING RESEARCH?**

The voices of educators themselves have often been missing from the knowledge base for teaching (Cochran-Smyth & Lytle, 1990). This has been even more evident in the field of early years education (Keyes, 2000; Meade, 2000). Many of those most directly responsible for the education of young children have sometimes felt disenfranchised. Campbell and Neill (1994) proposed that early years educators were too conscientious for their own good and were a malleable, predominantly female, workforce exploited by predominantly male policy makers. The scope and understanding of educators of early years issues and their beliefs and knowledge, were demonstrated in the testimonies given to the House of Commons Select Committee (2000) where Pascal and Bertram (House of Commons, 2000, pp. 82-83) stated that EYES need “to apply this knowledge to their practice and ensure their work is at the forefront of professional knowledge.” Whilst it is crucial that their knowledge base is articulated to an audience of policy makers, it is also important that EYES are able to advocate their critical issues and beliefs about what they see as valuable for young children's care and education. Similarly, how they perceive their professional roles and standing is crucial to how they operate as professionals. Policy makers need to ascertain the personal and professional critical interests of EYES in order to maintain the expertise of those working in the field. Teacher thinking methodology can be used, not only to elicit professional knowledge, but also professional issues and interests.

Research on „teacher thinking” began in 1976, to develop methodologies to determine the thinking and knowledge of experienced and complex professionals working in a variety of settings. The International Study Association on Teacher Thinking

(ISATT) is a progressive field of research that was formed in 1982. It promoted theoretical and empirical research through many small-scale qualitative studies with combinations of interview, questionnaire, observation, biographical and autobiographical data collection. Researchers in this field have diverse backgrounds such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, and mathematics. The aim of teacher thinking research was to give teachers a voice, promote recognition and analysis of the complexity of the phenomena to be studied and to connect teachers' perceptions with implications for policy (Day, Pope & Denicolo, 1990, p. 4). There is now a stimulating range of contemporary research evolving around this methodology of ETT and it has established a place for itself in international education research enterprise (Clark, 1995). Until very recently this has mostly been undertaken with teachers in secondary and primary education. The methodology, although entitled „teacher thinking,” is equally applicable for eliciting the thinking of a range of professionals and others who educate young children, since they are working in similar contexts, trying to meet the same kinds of demands. Contemporary research using this methodology to determine professional thinking of EYES has been undertaken by Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997), Anning and Edwards (1999), Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999), Anning (2002), Moyles, Adams and Musgrove (2002), Brock (2006; 2009; 2013), Brock and Rankin (2011).

Research on teacher thinking can be approached from two different positions, either adopting a theoretical researcher perspective or a teacher practitioner perspective. The former position normally has the theoretical perspective set prior to data collection and teachers fit within a framework of the researchers' selected theory, policy or curriculum practice and the research is accomplished through questionnaires, surveys and observations. The second type of research is undertaken to determine educators' own understandings, with accounts in their own terms, often through in-depth open-ended interviews. “Knowledge derived from research adopting a theoretical researcher perspective is knowledge of the universal: of what things are and how they look in general,” whereas in “studies adopting a teacher practitioner perspective, the knowledge claimed is of the individual case: of what things are and how they work in particular circumstances” (Clandinin, 1986, p. 11). Research on teacher thinking has documented that educators develop and hold implicit theories, which may be about their pupils, the subject matter, their roles and responsibilities, and which are most likely eclectic drawn from varied sources of personal experience, academic knowledge, beliefs, values, biases. Clark (1995, p. 114) indicates that „these systems of thought are not clearly articulated or codified by their owners, but they are typically inferred and reconstructed by researchers on teacher thinking.”

### THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

When undertaking research, it is important to begin to examine both ethical issues and one's position as a researcher. Qualitative research can be problematic in terms of reliability. Different observers may have different interpretations, data ex-

tracts may be brief and interpretations of interview transcripts may be undermined if everything is not recorded. There may be problems of „anecdotalism”—how sound are the explanations if the researcher includes only „a few telling examples” of some apparent phenomenon (Silverman, 2000, p. 10). It is incumbent on the researcher to document procedures to ensure the methods used were reliable, demonstrate that categories have been used consistently and that the conclusions are valid. “The research ethic for truth, or academic integrity, requires researchers to be scrupulous in avoiding distortion of evidence and weakly supported assertions in the reports of writings” (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2003, p. 5).

It is therefore important to show rigour in qualitative research, by ensuring that the philosophic position of the researcher is made clear (Meade, 2000). Researchers not only need to be careful not to lead interviewees, but also need to acknowledge their own preconceptions and beliefs. It is good practice to try to communicate the position and role of the researcher, as all research is influenced by the ideology of the researcher (BERA, 2003, p. 5). If researcher inference is involved, then there is a danger of compromising the reliability of the research and so bring into question researcher validity. “Unless the researcher subjects her own assumptions to scrutiny, her interpretations of others cannot be regarded as reliable” (Brooker, 2000). Aubrey, David, Godfrey and Thompson (2000, p. xii) advises early years practitioners to “adopt a healthy scepticism towards educational theories” and to examine the early childhood knowledge base critically and so, avoid over-simplification and polarised debates. A good example of this was Evans (2002) who was very concerned to present „an accurate portrayal of how teachers feel” in her research of nineteen primary teachers’ attitudes to their work. It is therefore important to provide a clear statement of methodological stance in terms of values and beliefs of the researcher with a justification of the choice of the research methods to be employed (BERA, 2003).

It is also necessary to bear in mind the distinction between „rhetoric and reality.” There may be tension between the researchers’ opinions regarding the reliability of their interviewees’ articulated beliefs and those actually being implemented in practice. Anning’s research determined that what practitioners espoused contrasted to their “beliefs in action,” indicating a disparity between rhetoric and practice, aspiration and action (Anning, 2002, p. 2). Her participants theorised through generalising their beliefs and value systems based on personal histories, culture and experience and these formed rhetoric from practitioners, with values often related to centre policy. This was also the case with Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997) research with teachers, where there was a contradiction between their rhetoric on providing play and their actual practice. In contrast, Harnett and Newman (2001, p. 11) ascertained that the teachers in their sample were able to articulate the pedagogy, which clearly underpinned their aims and practice. This tension between „rhetoric and reality” is not so crucial for my research, as it is primarily concerned with eliciting educators’ thinking rather than examining their actual practice; however, it needs to be interrogated when addressing the validity of the researchers’ analysis of the data. When eliciting thinking, the researcher needs to be aware that the participants may offer what

that they think she will find acceptable; for example, they “may say that they believe in developmentally appropriate practices because it is the socially and professionally accepted philosophy” (as cited in Saracho & Spodek, 2003, p. 127). Therefore, the researcher may need to probe into educators’ underpinning perceptions, principles and philosophies through collecting a “plethora of data about practitioners’ perceptions” (Moyles et al., 2002, p. 2). A variety of strategies may be necessary to be effective for eliciting thinking to provide credible data.

#### **STRATEGIES FOR ELICITING TEACHER THINKING WITH EXAMPLES FROM RESEARCH**

„ETT” methodology was initially undertaken with educators in secondary education, closely followed by research in the primary age phase. However, as stated earlier, it is only very recently that it has been used in the field of early years education. The following examples of research are illustrations of ETT methodology. The commonality between them is that each of these examples has attempted to determine educators’ own understandings through drawing out their voices about different aspects of their professionalism. The ways educators perform their professional roles are grounded in their backgrounds and biographies, with their hopes and aspirations being as relevant as the skills they have acquired (Hargreaves, 1994; Clark, 1995).

Teacher thinking can be elicited through a variety of methodological strategies and the examples of contemporary research evidenced in this chapter have used diverse approaches. Many of these research studies used multi-methods and elicited responses through different combinations of strategies, the most frequent of these being interviewing, questionnaires or observations. Interviewing can be effected through many diverse techniques, eliciting information through structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews, or through narrative accounts, stories, life-histories, biographies, video-stimulated interviews or focus groups. Data can be gathered through the process of interviewing using prompts such as photographs, key questions, timelines, video extracts.

„Voice” is a term used increasingly by researchers who want to determine educators’ thinking. Christopher Day has had a long-term career concern with teachers’ professional development and within this, a particular interest in bridging perceived theory-practice tensions through the development and dissemination of grounded theory often referred to as „teachers’ voice” (Day, 1999, p. 1). He determined that there had been few stories of teachers from different phases of education. The purpose of Day’s (1999) research was to “contribute to knowledge of teacher professionalism” through stories about how a sample of teachers’ personal and professional lives had been affected by the government imposed change. Goodfellow (2003, p. 63) encouraged the early years practitioners to think critically about the values, traditions, beliefs and assumptions that underlined their professional practice. She believed the nature of the early childhood professional’s work, was being largely ignored in public documents, that the “underpinnings of professional practice that lie within practical wisdom appear



to be unrecognised and remain undervalued” (Goodfellow, 2003, p. 48). Pascal and Bertram (1997) devised a very effective questionnaire to determine the professional experience and interests of the EYES involved in the Effective Early Learning Project. Teacher thinking can be elicited through the process of interviewing using prompts such as photographs, key questions, time-lines. Sá-Chaves and Alarcão’s (2000, p. 1) research focused on the “analysis and the *reading* of a vast collection of genuine photographs” to stimulate and deepen reflection on the multi and inter-dimensional structure of teachers’ professional knowledge. Biographies, stories or diaries can be used as resources for to help teachers articulate their voice as a way of constructing and reconstructing the purposes and priorities in their work (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Smith, 1999).

The most common strategy for ETT is through semi-structured interviews. A skilled interviewer is economic in what she says, decentring from herself and focusing on the interviewee (Gillham, 2000). Interviewing relies on the personal skills and judgements of the interviewer, who needs to be careful not to be seen as “a threat or an expert” (Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998), as there will inevitably be a „power” relationship between the researcher and interviewees (as cited in Smyth, 1987). It is important to create a two-way open and friendly discussion which can further probe and elicit responses, and allow interviewees to have more freedom to respond in their own way (Denscombe, 1998). A comfortable relaxed atmosphere in an informal setting and quiet location was Elbaz’s (1983) preference for her interviews to elicit teachers’ thinking. Blenkin and Kelly (1997) found that interviews conducted as conversations between fellow professionals were effective in gaining deeper insights into the realities of particular situations and the values and views of those participating. The interviewee is often an equal, being the researcher’s partner in teacher thinking research (Sabar, 1994). Focus group interviews are efficient qualitative data collection techniques that elicit the interaction of a small group of people discussing a specific topic, prompt or focus for approximately two hours (Denscombe, 1998; Flick, 2002). Focus group research “rests on the assumption that individuals have their own personal ideas, opinions and understandings and that it is the task of the researcher is to access or elicit these cognitions” (Smith, 2003, p. 184). Moderating focus groups is a skilled technique, as it necessitates encouraging everyone to contribute, whilst discouraging over talkative participants or managing „strong” disagreement (Smith, 2003, p. 187).

Video has been described as the most underused tool in professional development (Leat, 2004). In their ethnographic studies Anning et al. (1990) trialled video-recording for teacher professional development with teachers in order to gain clearer meanings from teachers about their actions in classrooms. Anning wanted to explore teachers’ thinking regarding the connections between her teacher participants’ theories and the teaching strategies they used. She invited them to select specific groups of children and curriculum activities, but even though her participants were confident and competent teachers they still found the prospect of being filmed daunting (Anning et al., 1990). However Broadhead, when using the video for collecting data in early years settings, discovered that it was a useful tool for teachers to gain insights

through reflect-on-action. Although using video cameras for stimulated recall by teachers can be traced back as far Adams and Biddle (as cited in Anning et al., 1990), technical, methodological and ethical issues have resulted, until recently, in its limited use as a research instrument (Anning et al., 1990). Some of these limitations may have arisen because researchers have had control of the focus, the actual activities and the handling of the camera.

However Moyles et al. (2002) found the use of video for reflection on practice a very successful strategy used to elicit teacher thinking. They explored varied methods to elicit practitioner thinking and found that “dialogues could be key in encouraging teachers to reflect upon and articulate aspects of their practice which standard interviewing methods were unlikely to uncover” (p. 167). This was further developed in the „Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning” (SPEEL). Project where practitioners’ implicit theories, values, beliefs and thinking were extracted through video stimulated reflective dialogue (Moyles et al., 2002). Each practitioner controlled the focus and pace of the dialogues and selected two or three „clips”, which showed the most effective aspects of their practice. In selecting one discrete pedagogical episode from the video, the pedagogy became highly contextualised and the reflective dialogue was a useful methodological tool for drawing out practitioners’ deeper reflections and perceptions of their pedagogy. This methodology can be very empowering, as video contextualised the concepts.

The method of eliciting educators thinking in the field of early years is fairly new and until recently the majority of government initiatives in the UK had lacked the voices of early years educators. This research fulfils that need through eliciting the voice of a small sample of EYES from varied professional roles. It draws upon some of the strategies from the examples of research mentioned in this chapter and is concerned with what is the most effective method of eliciting credible data about their thinking. In order to ensure validity and reliability, a range of methodological techniques were used. The mixed methodology will include „face to face” methods of semi-structured interviews and reflection-on-action video interviews (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Moyles et al., 2002), but also more „distance” techniques without the presence of the researcher, asking participants to complete autobiographical personal/professional time-lines, CPD questionnaires, and email correspondence. Multi-methods of gathering data obviously provide different kinds of data on the same topic, allowing the researcher to see from different perspectives. This enhances the validity of the data and the understanding of the topic in a more rounded and complete fashion (Denscombe, 1998). Through this range of methods the thinking of early years educators thinking were elicited, through implementing „richer forms” of data collection alongside the more conventional interviewing process.

## THE RESEARCH PROCESS

- » A pilot study of early years educators on Bradford College’s early years in-service courses to determine pragmatics and issues.

- » The main study was implemented with a purposive „non-contaminated” sample of early years educators, who were contacted through suggestions from colleagues; professors at Leeds University; Bradford Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

#### THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- » *How do these early years educators define their „professional’ knowledge”?*
- » *What do they perceive to be the critical issues that affect their practice as early years educators?*
- » *How do they meet the demands of imposed policy change?*
- » *What are the most effective methods of eliciting their thinking?*

#### THE PARTICIPANTS

The „purposeful sampling” of twelve Early Years Educators (EYES) in Local Authorities in West Yorkshire was undertaken in order to gain “information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Prosser, 2001, p. 3). The pilot sample had all been women, mostly mature, and fairly mono-ethnic. In the main research project the participants were selected from a wider group that addressed the issues of age and ethnicity. Mayo-Robbins (2002) research suggested that age, gender and ethnicity factors interact in complex ways, which affect the experiences of educators. The sample was a cross section of gender, ethnicity, age of service and from a variety of the different roles within early years:

- » Nursery nurses;
- » Reception / foundation stage / Early Excellence teachers;
- » Nursery and independent school head-teachers;
- » Private day-care and Sure Start managers in work place and community based nurseries;
- » Lecturers in further and higher education.

“Selecting representative samples is quite complex and entails decision making around not only the characteristics of the participants, but also how many should be included” (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. 25). Assembling a sample of twelve participants with this diversity was a little difficult and did take some time to organise. Some EYES who were initially contacted were worried it would create an extra workload and declined to participate. The gender issue was considered to be problematic because the field of early years is a mainly female workforce; however, three men’s names were put forward and all agreed to participate in the research. The objective was to determine whether the different roles and qualifications of the participants demonstrated commonalities or differences regarding the research ques-

tions. Would they evidence different professional knowledge and critical issues? Table 1 demonstrates the „balance” of the sample’s professional roles and their code names that they will be known as throughout the study.

Table 1  
*Participants’ code names*

NURSERY NURSES	FOUNDATION STAGE TEACHERS	RECEPTION TEACHERS	HEAD-TEACHERS	MANAGERS	LECTURERS
NN1	FST1	RT1	HT1	MPDC	LFE
NN2	FST2	RT2	HIS	MSS	LHE

**Data Collection**

- » Visits to each participant’s setting to form a perspective of the teaching context.
- » Constructing a personal/professional time-line.
- » Completing a questionnaire.
- » Semi-structured interviews of one hour’s duration, which were recorded and transcribed.
- » Practitioner videoing of aspects of practice followed by reflective interviews.
- » Focus group meeting and discussion.

**Data elicited through questionnaires**

Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire to establish their background and professional context. The questionnaire had been adapted after trialling in the Pilot and the length, complexity, design, types of questions were reconsidered, as there was now a clearer view of what was wanted. Questionnaires can be a very versatile data-gathering method and can gather descriptive data regarding personal histories; events – what, where, when; insights into respondents’ attitudes and perceptions „what do they think?” or “which” part of their role do they enjoy most”; or evaluative – how effective, valuable is something (Campbell, McNamara & Gilroy, 2004, p. 146). The questionnaire was organised to elicit the participants’ responses regarding events and opinions. Some of the questions included were adapted from Pascal and Bertram’s (1997) questionnaire for participants in the Effective Early Learning Project. Educators’ development is located within their personal and professional lives and in the policy of settings in which they work and their needs will vary “according to circumstance, personal histories and current dispositions” (Day, 1999, p. 1).

Information gained about the participants at the beginning of the research provided a profile of participants demonstrating their gender, age and ethnicity. Their role, qualifications, type of setting and authority in which they were working at the time of the research was documented. There were two participants of each of the follow-

ing „role” categories—nursery nurses, Foundation Stage teachers, reception teachers, head-teachers, managers and lecturers. All worked in early years education in a variety of settings. Both nursery nurses worked in urban primary schools, one in a nursery in an Education Action Zone (EAZ) in Bradford and the other in a Foundation Stage Unit in Kirklees, where 96% of the children had English as an additional language. The Foundation Stage teachers were colleagues in an Early Excellence Centre, also in an urban area, which had a high percentage of English as an Additional Language and Special Educational Needs children. The reception teachers were coincidentally both located within primary schools in the same district of East Leeds. RT1 taught the only reception class in the school, whereas there was parallel reception class in RT2's school. The two managers worked in quite different settings in the centre of Bradford. The head teachers were also managers of settings, but had the titles of head teachers. HT1 was in charge of a large 160 place state nursery in an urban environment in Kirklees authority. There were 80 am and 80 pm children of mixed language and cultural diversity, as well as a large staff to co-ordinate. HIS was the proprietor of an independent Montessori school in a Bradford district, with a small number of children on roll at the time of the research. Involving the two lecturers in the research widened the scope of the participants' roles; both had previous experience in teaching young children, but after a variety of experiences had moved into the same FE and HE college, LFE in further education and LFE in a higher education department.

The questionnaire established the participants' professional experience, which was gathered through their responses in the questionnaires. It was both coincidental and interesting that if they were „paired” according to their roles, their length of employment in early years education was often similar. The nursery nurses were the youngest participants and both had been working as EYES for four years, both the two reception teachers had taught for five years, and the managers had the longest service in the field of twenty plus years. Most of them had worked in state education in nursery or primary education, except for MSS and HIS. Several had worked in the private education/care sector—MPDC, MSS, LFE, NN2, LFE, NN2 and HT1 had been involved in voluntary work, but only RT1 had worked in business. Between them the sample had diverse educational employment experiences in the caring and educational fields which included home/school liaison, social worker, special educational needs, adult education, childcare, school governor, private nursing home care and wraparound care.

Their reasons for becoming an EYE were mainly ideological, based on both a strong interest and enjoyment in their roles and an interest/belief in child development, which had developed through personal experience of own children or working with young children. LHE stated that working in early years education gave her intellectual stimulation and personal satisfaction, and this seemed to be the case with the other EYES. The aspects of their work that gave them the most satisfaction were again to do with children developing, learning and progressing. They valued working and sharing enthusiasm and experiences with children, staff, parents, student and other professionals. The areas that gave them the least satisfaction were quite varied. Most of them had elements of stress or conflict through external pressures with none of them evi-

dencing problems with their roles or actual work with young children. Their areas of dissatisfaction were quite varied and perhaps very pertinent to aspects relating to their specific roles. They included issues connected with politics, sustainability of quality provision, financial tasks or funding, paperwork, misconceptions regarding early years, lack of parental involvement, lack of enthusiasm, formal assessment procedures, transition unnecessary meetings and pressure from other key stage teachers regarding children's transition. Several stated that they were happy with their present roles in working with young children, often with thought on developing related aspects to their role. Some stated that they were not ambitious, but would like to share their expertise or be involved in training others. A few had individual ambitions—developing own nursery, developing ICT in school, becoming an EY co-ordinator, working with SEN children in future, beginning a family. Both the lecturers were keen to do research as well as returning to work with children in the near future. The majority of the EYES were continually involved in continuing professional development, all stated that they regularly attended short courses, MMS and HT1 had recently attained Bachelor's and Master's degrees, LFE and LHE had enrolled on Master's and doctorate awards.

This group of early years educators exhibited quite diverse set of routes into early years education. Very few of them actually started their working life as early years educators—NN1 and RT2 are the only two participants who went directly to college and then into early years education. Both FST had travelled before „settling down” to teaching and NN2, MSS and RT1 had trained after doing other occupations; HT1, MPDC and FST1 had taught older pupils prior to moving into early years. HIS, LHE and LFE had „arrived” in teaching after doing other higher degree qualifications. As HIS stated in her interview “it's quite interesting how you chose what you're going to do.”

### *Data elicited through personal/professional timelines*

To determine if age, ethnicity and gender did create differences to the participants' experiences and opinions in this study, they were asked to compile a personal/professional timeline. At the commencement of the research, in order to gain a personal perspective and a view that could be correlated to other early years educators, I completed an autobiography and a personal/professional timeline. This demonstrated the personal and professional events that had, in my opinion, influenced my career development. Critical incidents are “key events in people's lives around which pivotal decisions revolve” (Tripp, 1993). The timeline proved to be a succinct, efficient and accessible way of demonstrating personal and professional information. “Life is chronology—we live in a flow of events” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 110) and a timeline offers an overview of significant achievements, of changing events and situations that can be seen „at a glance.” Each participant was given the researcher's personal/professional time line as a model. There is a commonly held view that female teachers needed to take family circumstances and regional factors into account for career development Mayo-Robbins's (2002, pp. 28, 33) research validated this and she

also determined that “older and younger teachers have different starting points with regard to career decisions and journeys.”

There was not as high a return of the timelines (55%) as there had been of the questionnaires and perhaps they may have been perceived to be more difficult to complete. The timelines demonstrate change and development across personal and professional lives. The participants entered what they considered to be important in affecting their personal/professional lives—what had influenced their development and achievements, what they saw as being significant or even what they remembered. The patterns emerging demonstrated consistent themes. The personal themes were childhood, family and relationships, moving house or city, travel, religion, politics and leisure. The first four themes arising are not at all surprising—they are what the most expected. Female teachers needed to take family circumstances and regional factors into account for career development, also “older and younger teachers have different starting points with regard to career decisions and journeys” (Mayo-Robbins, 2002, p. 33). „Older” teachers make decisions informed by experience of other work and life experiences when they decide to enter teaching. HT1, MMS, HIS, MPDC (the older female participants) had made definite career change decisions to move into early years education. In contrast LFE, LHE, RT1, RT2 and NN1 drifted into or were directed towards into teaching, and some were perhaps still in the process of still testing out career choices. Travel, for work or for holidays, occurred in several of the timelines and this was across both genders and across the age ranges. All three men involved in the research completed timelines and it was striking that the documented their leisure / passions as being important stating their interests of music, sport, computers, whereas only one of the female participants mentioned any leisure aspect. Are men and women motivated in different ways—it was noticeable that the men have time to indulge in other hobbies? All the women who had children did not itemise their interests, perhaps their passions have to be their families and jobs, as there is little time left for other interests. However it has to be noted that two out of the three male participants had young children, and LFE in particular undertook responsibility for childcare.

The main professional themes were primary/secondary schools, qualifications, teaching jobs, training others, continuing professional development (CPD) courses, qualifications, promotion or changes in role. All participants appeared to be motivated in continuing to participate in CPD and seeing further education, training and achieving qualifications as significant milestones in their timelines. Several had achieved promotion and it was interesting is that, in this sample, the female participants who had achieved the „higher” promotion posts—perhaps age plays a part in this as these females were older. More than half Mayo-Robbins (2002) respondents did not perceive attitudes to gender as being an issue in their job seeking experiences. At the time of the research, the National Leadership College in England was offering specific programmes for women and for ethnic minority teachers with pay to reward skills, qualifications and experience. Yet despite an increased recruitment drive, men into teaching had declined consistently. Being a male is often perceived to give an

advantage in promotion, though can conversely caused difficulties in gaining jobs in the fields of early years.

### *Data elicited through Interviews*

The purpose of interviewing was to elicit the participants' perspectives of their critical issues regarding early years education. They were conducted as conversations with an interested recipient who would like to know more about a topic and involved paraphrasing, probing, summarising, echoing and used non verbal communication. These interviews, perhaps because of the relaxed nature and semi-structured approach, which fitted around interruptions and demands from children and other adults, elicited rich data. "Conversations with a purpose' allow a 'maximum freedom for the respondent'" (MacNaughton et al., 2001, p. 151). Gillham (2000) proposed that an interview might start with an open introduction such as "What is it you're concerned about?" and I tried to emulate this with "How did you become an early years educator?" and this open question also elicits details about why, when and where they entered into the field. In order to check for reliability across all the interviews, I later decided to „interrogate" my questioning and determine if I had „led" the participants in any way, using WINMAX CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) to examine my questioning strategies. The results were pleasing—I found very few instances where I initiated the focus and few leading questions. The whole of each of the interviews was transcribed. They were then analysed at several levels:

- » Reviewing the tapes to determine the critical issues and interests of individual participants;
- » Highlighting key aspects mentioned;
- » Word count of key aspects;
- » Concept mapping around key aspects;
- » First analysis of content written against transcriptions.

It was then I decided I needed a more sophisticated way of analysing the discourse and so employed WINMAX CAQDAS for coding, sorting and analysing to determine key topics and themes. The software available for CAQDAS is largely related to a grounded theory approach. The use of computers in qualitative data analysis can enable researchers to keep better track of data, help develop and test interview questions and schedules, test theories, preserve and analyse rhetoric and actions. WINMAX enabled constant presentation of data content and contexts, the ability to retrieve coded data quickly and accurately, and to redefine, map and chart data. The analysis process then involved the—

- » Determination of codes;
- » Analysing the Data-Sorting and Coding;
- » Coding of each transcript using WINMAX – qualitative data analysis software;
- » Quantification and analysis of „hits" of codings individually and overall;



» Sorting sub-codes into tables.

The topics raised by the participants resulted in the application of 96 codes. These demonstrated the areas of interest arising through the interviews. The coded aspects were then collated into the three themes of Professionalism; Working Relationships and Curriculum and Pedagogy. These three themes comprised of discourse relating to:

- » „Professionalism”—professional issues—the interplay between personal / professional.
- » How have these educators become knowledgeable? What is the interplay between professional and practical knowledge? How do they perceive their professionalism?
- » „Working relationships”—Culture and working practice with significant others.
- » How do working relationships affect what is delivered?
- » Influences of national and local directives and initiatives, LEAs, staff, parents, family.
- » „Curriculum and Pedagogy” knowledge relating to the „what and how” of teaching and learning. What is the knowledge base of these early years educators?

Table 2  
*Key Themes and sub-codes*

PROFESSIONALISM	WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY
Appropriate training		Curriculum
<b>Courses; qualifications; CPD</b>	National directives	Pedagogy
Practical knowledge and expertise	Initiatives and funding	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
<b>Acclaim, status, pay, value</b>	Local Education Authorities	Developmentally appropriate practice
Change, pressure, conforming	Community liaison	
Professional role	Parents	Play
<b>Environment and ethos</b>	Multidisciplinary teams Liaison with other services	Individual needs
<b>Interest, commitment and enjoyment</b>	Staff relationships	„Too Much Too Soon”
	Staff development	Transition
Skills of managing, organising, teaching, planning, assessing		Ideology

### *Reflection-on-video interviews*

The use of videoing practice by the early years educators was further means of eliciting their thinking about their professional and practical knowledge. A sample of the participants were provided with a palmcorder and they were asked to video any practice or aspects of interest in their settings and then to select five minutes of the video that they would like to reflect upon in a follow up interview. The instructions were „vague” in order not to direct the participants into any particular focus. It varied as to whether the participants had previously used a video camera to record practice. HT1 had purchased one for her nursery and they used it for a variety of purposes—recording special events, staff development, observations of individual children, monitoring organisation and effective teaching and learning. RT2’s school used a video camera to record significant occasions; NN1 and MPDC had never previously used a video camera in their settings. They felt they had open minds about its relevance, whilst HT1 obviously already valued its potential. Whilst there were problems arising from using the video such as time, quality, sound, initial apprehension, they were outweighed by the benefits. From the researcher’s perspective these were the:

- » Quality of responses from the EYES;
- » Reflection on practice;
- » Effectiveness as a tool;
- » Excitement / enjoyment of the activity by several of EYES;
- » Effectiveness for reflection on practice;
- » Fascinating and really useful for observing children.

The benefits articulated by the EYES included:

- » Staff development;
- » Observing individual children, particularly for children with special educational needs;
- » Challenging teacher expectation, preconceptions and assumptions;
- » Keeping a record to reflect at a convenient time;
- » Allowed time to make interpretations;
- » Enables observations of things „would not have seen otherwise;”
- » Showed the length of time and quality of concentration, which cannot be appreciated;
- » Useful to example good practice;
- » Useful to example child behavior;
- » Useful to view aspects of child development;
- » Demonstrates what children are capable of;
- » Much easier and more enjoyable than doing the paperwork of written observations;
- » Evidence for psychological service.

The direct examples of practice on the videotapes enabled the EYES to talk about specific activities, incidents, children or their organisation. They were able to articulate about their practice and ideology through having the contextualisation of the videos. Much of the talk became centred in curriculum and pedagogy, individual needs and the skills of teaching. The video interviews elicited much more detailed information about the play based curriculum and developmentally appropriate practice; individual needs and inclusion; English as an additional language, gender, personal, social and emotional development. The skills of organising and managing and most particularly of observing and assessing were evidenced through the reflection-on-practice. The videos contextualised the EYES professional/practical knowledge and promoted reflection-in-action, enabling them to analyse as they articulated on provision. RT2 “I choose to this like this to see the children’s responses because when you are actually teaching it’s difficult to see all their responses.” Most of the EYES evidenced „excitement” about what they saw children were capable of, that was captured on the videoing—perhaps because it became more tangible on film, even than in actuality. The EYES were excited about how their professional knowledge and expertise was evidenced in practice. The EYES talked about how and why they organised the children, but what was most interesting was that whilst they were articulating their objectives, they were reflecting on what they needed to further develop and improve. NN1 “we’ve obviously got to look at more what they do like and concentrate on that.” The skills of teaching were evidenced in action and the methodological strategy of video-reflection was excellent for demonstrating knowledge about action, eliciting professional and practical knowledge from the visual data. The palmcorder was determined by most of them to be an effective tool for observation and assessment.

Table 3

*The specific reflections on practice selected by the EYES*

	PRIMARY FOCUS	SECONDARY FOCUS	ADDITIONAL ASPECTS ARISING
HT <sub>1</sub>	Community / parental involvement – individual needs?	Danish Forest Schools pedagogy	Staff Development
MPDC	Expertise and knowledge of the managers Child development and progression through the age ranges	High Scope pedagogy	
NN <sub>1</sub>	Organisation promoting effective child involvement	Individual needs – EAL and SEN	Confident children
RT <sub>1</sub>	Organisation promoting effective child involvement	Use of ICT	

### Focus Group

Fifty per cent of the participants attended the focus group meeting LHE, LFE, MPDC, HT1, FST2, RT2. After coffee and cakes, general introductions and conversation, I presented an overview of research—who had been involved, the organisation and collation of data and the purpose of the meeting as a means of validation. This was the first time I had hosted a focus group meeting, so was unsure of how to proceed, but the participants were excellent, as after the introduction they began to share opinions as a group and after the first few minutes I did not contribute at all. They were professionals discussing what interested them, what was common ground, the cause and effect of policy and change. The focus group meeting promoted debate, raised wider educational issues, enabled affirmation and confirmation of ideological perspectives with informative others. There was some strength of feeling and passion for personal perspectives. The meeting demonstrated their shared interests and facilitated validation for the research findings.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS OF ELICITING THE EYES THINKING REGARDING ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

This empirical research was undertaken to elicit educators' perspectives, to determine their own understandings, with accounts in their own terms through in-depth open-ended interviews, questionnaires, personal/professional time-lines, video-reflective-interviews on practice and focus group interviews. The use of the varied methodological strategies gave enabled the research questions to be answered and Table 4 demonstrates which strategies elicited thinking in answer to three of the research questions.

Table 4  
*Aspects elicited through the different methodologies*

	QUESTIONNAIRES	TIMELINES	SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	REFLECTIVE VIDEO INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW
How do the EYEs define their „professional” knowledge?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
What do they perceive to be the critical issues that affect their practice as EYEs?			✓	✓	✓

	QUESTIONNAIRES	TIMELINES	SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	REFLECTIVE VIDEO INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW
How do they meet the demands of policy change?			✓		✓

The answer to the fourth research question—what are the most effective methods of eliciting their thinking?—can be determined in Table 5 which demonstrates how a range of strategies are important to elicit a depth and variety of thinking from participants. The varied data collection strategies are key to the research as they provide a more holistic perspective on the early years educators’ professionalism than the use of one strategy.

Table 5  
*The type of data that each methodological strategy elicited*

Time lines	Factual evidence Interrelationship between personal and professional experience Professional and personal influences
Questionnaires	Factual evidence Personal inclinations Professional experience and qualifications Career entry, career routes, CPD
Interviews	Professional/personal experience Self identity as a professional in the wider environment as perceived by others; Projecting self to an outside audience Professional role <b>Professionalism</b> <b>Critical issues and interests</b> Working relationships
Video interviews	Contextualises professional/practical knowledge Reflection-on-practice Elicited most detailed information about curriculum and pedagogy Analysis of skills of teaching Observation of children’s individual needs
Focus groups	Promoted debate Wider educational issues Promoted affirmation and confirmation of ideological perspectives with informative others Strength of feeling <b>Validated findings</b> <b>Shared interests and collegiality</b>

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the research is to give early years educators a voice, to promote recognition of the complexity of the phenomena to be studied and to determine the most effective methods of eliciting their thinking. The research revealed insights into the EYES' knowledge domains, beliefs and practice and demonstrated the interplay between their personal and professional ideology and values. The methodological strategies facilitated the articulation and the elicitation of the participants' professional thinking. The findings endorsed that a range of strategies is essential to gain different aspects and a depth of thinking to provide a holistic perspective of the participants' professionalism and professional role. An enhanced understanding of how key knowledge domains of early years educators are generated and sustained was established. The findings from the research generated the seven dimensions of knowledge, education, skills, autonomy, values, ethics and reward as demonstrated in Table 6—A typology of professionalism for Early Years Educators. It is important that EYES articulate their professionalism to stakeholders such as government, policymakers, colleagues and parents. EYES need to affirm their professional knowledge, the complexity of their role and promote their professional expertise, in order for early childhood education and care to have high status and high quality of provision.

Further details of this research can be found in Brock (2013), *Building a model of early years professionalism from practitioners' perspectives* and Brock and Rankin (2011), *Professionalism in the early years interdisciplinary team: supporting young children and their families*.

Table 6  
*A typology of professionalism for Early Years Educators*

Knowledge	Systematic body of knowledge, as well as knowledge gained through experience
	Professional knowledge integrated with practical experience to develop expertise in the field
	Knowledge from varied theoretical premises
	Recognition of the knowledge of the expertise of the parties involved
Education	Qualifications gained through FE and HE and apprenticeship through working in the field, applying knowledge to practical experiences
	Appropriate training with regard to young children's learning and development
	Training to deliver flexible, developmentally appropriate services and curriculum that demanded a high level of pedagogic knowledge
	Self-directed continuing professional development to further develop knowledge and expertise

Skills	<p>Well-developed complex multidisciplinary skills that encompass the demands of the role</p> <p>Effective teamwork, with different professionals, creating an inclusive ethos</p> <p>Ability to exercise significant judgments with regard to appropriate practice and skill exercised in new problems and situations</p> <p>Monitoring and evaluating effectiveness to inform practice and provision</p> <p>Effective communication of aims and expectations to the many and varied stakeholders</p> <p>Ability to critique, reflect and articulate understanding and application</p>
Autonomy	<p>Stronger voice in the shaping of relevant policy and practice</p> <p>Consulted as experts with recognition of professional knowledge and expertise</p> <p>Autonomy over professional responsibilities and recognition of professionalism, promoting status and value in the field</p> <p>Ability to exercise discretionary judgment regarding service</p> <p>Vocational aspects recognised and endorsed</p>
Values	<p>Sharing of a similar ideology based on appropriate knowledge, education and experience</p> <p>Beliefs in principles for appropriate provision that meets children's and families' needs</p> <p>Altruistic orientation through commitment to professional values and vocation built on moral and social purposes</p> <p>Public service and accountability to the community and client group of children and families</p> <p>Creating an environment of trust and mutual respect inherent in the professional role</p>
Ethics	<p>Ethical principles and engaging with values consistent with the discipline</p> <p>High level of commitment to professional role and to the client group of parents, carers and children</p> <p>Commitment to collaborative and collective behaviour</p> <p>Inclusiveness whilst valuing diversity in all working relationships, including children, families and communities</p> <p>Self regulating code of ethics</p>
Reward	<p>Personal satisfaction, interest and enjoyment in the work</p> <p>Commitment for professional role</p> <p>Being valued and gaining acclaim for the professional expertise by their client group and by policymakers</p> <p>Forming strong and supportive relationships</p> <p>Pay—financial remuneration; stability and security of tenure</p> <p>Passionate about working with children</p>

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**JAK NAUCZYCIELE PRZEDSZKOLNI DEFINIUJĄ I DOSKONAŁĄ SVOJĄ ROLĘ  
ZAWODOWĄ? METODOLOGICZNE PODEJŚCIE DO POGŁĘBIANIA MYŚLENIA  
NAUCZYCIELI PRZEDSZKOLNYCH**

**ABSTRAKT:** Niniejsze badania przeprowadzono w celu pozyskania i zgłębienia opinii oraz refleksji grupy nauczycieli przedszkolnych w trzech lokalnych okręgach szkolnych (Local Education Authorities) w West Yorkshire. Nauczanie przedszkolne wymaga refleksyjnej i wysoko wykwalifikowanej kadry zdolnej do formułowania i wyrażania opinii i myśli. Umiejętność poddania własnej praktyki oraz przemyśleń na jej temat refleksyjnemu oglądowi i ocenie jest jednym z fundamentów profesjonalizmu niezbędnego w tej dziedzinie. Celem niniejszych badań była ekstrapolacja sposobów myślenia niewielkiej grupy nauczycieli przedszkolnych w trzech okręgach szkolnych w West Yorkshire. Aby uzyskać wgląd w opinie i przemyślenia tych nauczycieli, zastosowano metodę pogłębiania myślenia nauczycieli, która to metoda miała ujawnić zagadnienia krytyczne z ich punktu widzenia, kluczowe punkty zainteresowania oraz ich wiedzę zarówno specjalistyczną jak i praktyczną. W podejściu przyjętym w badaniu nie nakierowywano uczestników na konkretne aspekty czy zagadnienia, starając się raczej umożliwić im samodzielne wskazanie ważnych dla nich samych obszarów krytycznych związanych z ich rolą zawodową. 'Pogłębianie myślenia' jest efektywną metodologią, pozwalającą na określenie i zgłębienie myślenia i wiedzy doświadczonych specjalistów pracujących w różnorodnych kontekstach. Tego typu badania empiryczne przeprowadzono w celu pozyskania opinii i wyobrażeń nauczycieli wyrażonych ich własnymi słowami, w oparciu o pogłębione otwarte wywiady, kwestionariusze, osobiste i zawodowe osie czasu, refleksyjną analizę nagrań video i zogniskowane wywiady grupowe. Zróżnicowane strategie zbierania danych są kluczowym elementem badań, gdyż pozwalają one na pozyskanie holistycznych i różnorodnych perspektyw i poglądów na zawodową rolę nauczycieli przedszkolnych. Celem badań było oddanie nauczycielom przedszkolnym głosu, przyczynienie się do uznania złożoności badawczej tego zjawiska i określenie najskuteczniejszej metody pogłębiania ich myślenia. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia metodologię i wyniki badań wskazujące, jak ta grupa nauczycieli przedszkolnych definiuje i doskonali swoją rolę zawodową.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** edukacja i opieka przedszkolna, metodologia pogłębiania myślenia, wiedza specjalistyczna, profesjonalizm, rola zawodowa

